

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 00260 171158Z

22

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 SAM-01

SAB-01 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 IO-11 ACDA-05

/070 W

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O R 171022Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5888

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJ: SYRIAN MEDIA REPORTING ON LEBANESE AIR FORCE ATTACK
AGAINST PALESTINIAN POSITIONS

1. SYRIAN MEDIA REPORTING JAN 16 ATTACK BY LEBANESE AIR FORCE
AIRCRAFT AGAINST PALESTINIAN POSITIONS HAS REFLECTED SARG
UNCERTAINTY HOW TO TREAT SUCH OBVIOUSLY SENSITIVE MATTER.
SYRIAN RADIO BROADCASTS JAN 16 MENTIONED THAT HEAVY FIGHTING
TAKING PLACE AROUND COUNTRY, THAT BEIRUT STREETS UNSAFE AND
THAT COS SHIHABI HAD MET WITH PRES FRANGIE IN PRESENCE G-2
CHIEF JULES BUSTANY. REPORTING ON LEBANON FOLLOWED LENGTHY
COVERAGE DEVOTED TO SC DEBATE ON ME, AND THERE NO MENTION
OF AIR FORCE ACTION. JAN 16 TELEVISION NEWS DID NOT MENTION
LEBANON. EARLY MORNING JAN 17 RADIO LED OFF WITH REPORT
THAT SHIHABI HAD MET WITH ASAD IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING HIS
RETURN FROM LEBANON AS PART OF ONGOING
SYRIAN EFFORTS TO PUT AN END TO FIGHTING. MINIMAL DETAILS GIVEN
BY RADIO DID NOT GO BEYOND NOTING STREETS OF CAPITAL UNSAFE.

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BY 0915 BROADCAST, COVERAGE OF SC DEBATE HAD REPLACED LEBANON

AS LEADOFF TOPIC.

2. COMMENT: SYRIAN MEDIA REPORTING REFLECTS SARG CONFUSION BETWEEN HIGHLIGHTING SC DEBATE, IN WHICH LEADERSHIP HAS INVESTED SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF DIPLOMATIC EFFORT AND WHICH DOMINATES PRESS, AND LEBANESE CRISIS, WHERE SARG DIPLOMACY ALSO ON LINE. CLASH BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE MILITARY SEVERELY EMBARRASSING TO SYRIANS AS WELL AS HIGHLY INFLAMMATORY, WHICH PROBABLY EXPLAINS DECISION NOT TO MENTION IT IN BROADCASTS. SYRIAN MEDIA HAVE SO FAR DECIDED TO DOWNPLAY RECENT LEBANESE EVENTS AND REPORT SITUATION IN CONTEXT OF CONTINUING SYRIAN DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO RESOLVE CRISIS. AIR FORCE ATTACKS, MENTIONED IN PASSING, ARE BEING PLAYED AS MUTINY BY FEW INDIVIDUALS, AND ONLY IN LIMITED CIRCULATION. DAMASCUS NEWSPAPERS, RADIO AND TV CONTINUE MUTE.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

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